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ABSTRACT

Student assessment is dependent on the educational views of the teacher. Arts pedagogy in comprehensive schools has several approaches, orientations, and even genres, each in turn having hidden practices of student evaluation. These stem on the one hand from the pedagogical tradition of the field (music, visual arts, drama, craft) and on the other hand from the status of the subject within the school system (arts subjects as entertainment vs. arts subjects as crucial elements in the development of a competent future citizen). This paper aims at developing a theoretical framework for studying assessment in arts subjects. Dance and drama education are not school subjects in Finland, but because the theoretical framework in the paper is developed using international research results and literature, it covers those subjects as well as music, visual arts, and craft/sloyd. Contains 3 figures and 30 references. (Author/BT)

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Student assessment in arts education: towards a theoretical framework

Abstract

Student assessment is dependent on the educational views of a teacher. Arts pedagogy in comprehensive schools has several approaches, orientations and even genres, each in turn each having hidden practices of student evaluation. These stem on the one hand from the pedagogical tradition of the field (music, visual arts, drama, craft) and on the other hand from the status of the subject within the school system (arts subjects as entertainment vs. arts subjects as crucial elements in the development of a competent future citizen).

Asessing students in arts subjects is a complex matter. This paper aims at developing a theoretical framework for studying assessment in arts subjects.

[1] Arja Puurula, sections 1 and 2, Seija Karppinen sections 3 and 4, section 5 jointly

1. Introduction

One morning the following e-mail arrived for the members of the electronic discussion group of Finnish music teachers. It was sent from a school situated in the most remote municipal in the middle of the mountains one thousand kilometres north of Helsinki, the capital of Finland.

> Hello from Lapland! Here I am pasting pads under the chair-legs in my music-class and thinking about a serious problem. I would like to hear what you, dear colleagues, think about it. In my school we are now making new minimum (baseline) criteria for assessment in each subject. In other words: when should I "encourage" a pupil by "awarding" him with a four (*note: in Finland the scale is from 4 = failed to10 = excellent*). And as music teachers we only know number four as a time signature! Personally, I can see no meaning in developing any kind of criteria for a hypothetical situation that will never come. Pupils come from so many various backgrounds, that it's totally impossible to find common criteria. Except in the situation when the pupil is always absent from music lessons – or to put it in a more positive way: he is doing something else during music lessons. But that is not a subject- based criterion! In other arts subjects they have started to define minimum criteria for "making" or "producing", for social skills and so on, but that's something that I don't want to do. IF we MUST define minimum criteria, they must be subject-related and everything else should be defined in some other way. And we certainly do not need to specify trivial matters. Someone very wise once said that if a teacher must give the lowest mark, he must check his teaching methods. Dear colleagues, please answer! The principal keeps on asking daily for my proposal for the minimum criteria in music!

How can performance criteria for a 7- year-old child be constructed in music, visual arts, craft and sports? My immediate answer to the above letter was why should we use numerical grading at the lower stage of comprehensive school at all when we have the possibility of giving a longer and more detailed verbal report in grades 1-4. The e-mail debate continued with a note from a music education researcher, who agreed, but suggested the grading system be also abolished from the higher levels of school for two good reasons: 1) only numbers 7 – 10 are now actually in use and number 6 is given only to the most impossible students, 2) the upper-level classes of comprehensive schools and senior secondary schools classes are so large that a teacher does not get to know each student by name.

For educational researchers it has been apparent for some time that numerical evaluation is inadequate for the school-related assessment of

children's creative work, but that requirement still exists in Finnish educational legislation (Anon. 1994). Statutory assessment requirements for the arts in the compulsory curriculum are in use in many countries, but not e.g. in Austria, France, Switzerland or Sweden (Robinson 1997). In Finland numerical evaluation is used in classes 5 - 9, but it can also be used at lower levels. Solely verbal evaluation is possible in classes 1 - 4 and that can be used in addition to numerical evaluation in all classes. The marked legislative emphases on numerical evaluation partly explains why the introduction of new methods of student assessment has been so slow. According to a recent nation-wide survey, 46% of lower level but only 25% of higher level comprehensive school teachers use verbal assessment in music; in visual arts 39% of lower level and 28% of higher level teachers used verbal assessment (Korkeakoski 1998).

But the norms that guide "official" evaluation in schools are only one side of the coin. Matters of assessment depend upon the pedagogical training and thinking of the teacher, as well as on her understanding of the goals of education, or her philosophy of arts education. Arts pedagogy in comprehensive schools has several approaches, orientations and even genres, all of which having hidden practices of student evaluation. These stem on one hand from the pedagogical tradition of the field (music, visual arts, drama, craft) and on the other hand from the status of the subject within the school system (arts subjects as entertainment vs. arts subjects as crucial elements in the development of a competent future citizens).

This presentation aims at developing a broad theoretical framework for student assessment within arts subjects. Dance and drama education are not school subjects in Finland, but because the theoretical framework in this paper is developed using international research results and literature, it also covers these subjects, as well as music, visual arts and craft/sloyd. In Finland, textilework as a school subject is also translated into English with the Scandinavian-origin word slöjd, "sloyd" to denote the strong emphasis on intellectual, mental and ethical aspects of the subject (Nygren-Landgärds 2000, 16-17).

The perspective of this paper is neither art philosophy nor aesthetics, but arts education and pedagogy. Assessment is used as a synonym for evaluation, even though this may create confusion. E.g. the term "evaluative assessment" was once suggested in the UK to provide aggregated information about the overall level of pupil achievement in any particular school, as a basis for comparing one school to another (Broadfoot 1996). Another example: within music education Elliott

(1995, 264), following a paper by Gardner makes a distinction between evaluation and assessment. According to Elliot "evaluation" is primarily concerned with grading, ranking, and other summary procedures for purposes of student promotion and curriculum evaluation, but "assessment" gathers information that can benefit students, teachers or parents directly as constructive feedback.

2. Traditional assessment in arts

Cunliffe (1998) describes the paradigm change in art education following the paper written by Clark, Day and Greer (1987). They distinguish two traditions in visual art education: "Creative self-expression" and "Discipline-based art education". The former aims at developing the creativity and self-expression of a child, and the latter at the development of an understanding of art. Cunliffe sees this shift to be currently underway in art education in the UK and claims that most teachers use a mixture of the two forms of art education. A distinction between the evaluation process in these approaches is evident. Clark et al. (ibid.) see evaluation in the "Creative self-expression approach" as based on the child's growth and the process of art making, and this kind of evaluation of student achievement is generally discouraged. In contrast, evaluation within "Discipline-based art education approach" is based on educational goals, it focuses on learning and it is seen to be essential for two reasons: first for confirming student progress, and second for programme effectiveness.

As presented by Efland (1990 and 1992, in Clark 1996, 14), the division between the Scientific-rationalist approach and the Romantic-expressive approach as historical patterns in the 20th century reminds one of Cunliffe's framework. In the U.S. context, discipline-centred art education was widely discussed from 1959-1965, and the Scientific-rationalist approach was accompanied by demands for accountability, a phase which lasted from 1965 to 1980. After that, the emphasis in art education was on excellence. Under the auspices of the Romantic-expressive approach the Creative expression phase took place from 1929 to 1940, and was followed in turn by Counterculture (1959–1965), Qualitative Inquiry (1965-1980) and Critical Theory (1980-) phases. One can easily see that the pedagogical methods used by different approaches inevitably emphasise different things. Scientific-rationalist arts education needs methods that compare students, selecting the most talented children as early as possible and using static, generally approved criteria for assessment. During teacher education and through joint curricula these criteria are filtered down to teachers. On the other

hand, the Romantic-expressive approach requires assessment methods that encourage children's creativity and free self-expression.

Bresler (1998) describes three genres of arts education that operate in U.S. primary schools: "child art", "fine art" and "art for children". She argues that these genres use different content, pedagogical methods and evaluation practices. "Child art" means original compositions created by children in dance, drama, visual art and music, "fine art" means classical works in the different arts fields created by established artists, and "art for children" means art created by adults especially for children. Especially within "child art", evaluation was regarded by teachers as incompatible with the functions of art, because criticism of the child might lower his self-esteem. Bresler also remarks that she observed little evaluation taken place in classes, and that teachers complained the lack of time for that.

Thus, within the Romantic-expressive tradition there are problems with student assessment, but Discipline-based art education faces problems, too. The following quotation comes from a dance education study of primary school age children:

> "I became aware that the art form is also held in the mind (of a child) and that it doesn't always express itself through the body in the way that the creator may wish. It simply isn't open to measurement. Are the children to be assessed on what is seen, or on their thoughts and ideas, which they often failed to translate into movement? If the assessment is purely behaviorist, it will miss most of the critical elements. It will, of course, make a passable list of evaluating technique, but will miss expression altogether." (Sedwick 1993, 108)

Problematic issues in traditional assessment in arts subjects can be summarised by the following list. Whether Scientific-rationalist or Romantic-expressive, or something in-between, assessment seems to be:

1. **Comparative:** pupils' products are graded in relation to the others in a group
2. **Selective**: seeking out the most talented and giving them feedback on their giftedness
3. **Quantitative**: in many countries arts subjects are still graded with a numerical scale using only one number to represent the whole range of various targets in an arts subject
4. **Teacher-centred**: pupils' self-assessment or peer-assessment are rarely used, or they are used as a means for comparing the products of different children and selecting the best and worse.

5. **Static**: teachers' criteria of "good" and "not so good" reflect the values they have accepted as norms during their own teacher training,
6. **End product-centred**: the art making, creative process as an entity is seldom the target of assessment. In visual arts and crafts the end product is assessed, in music, drama and dance the final performance.
7. **Culture-bound**: the criteria of the majority population is valued most and minority groups (ethnic, religious etc.) may be marginalised
8. **Restricted**; learning in arts subjects is limited to the aesthetic product making, not to intellectual development like "appraising", "appreciating", "knowing", "ability to criticise" or tacit knowledge; arts is stripped of its intellectual substance
9. **Periodical**; assessment is made at the end of the term or when the reports of the attainments of pupils are made, it is not done on daily or weekly basis to give immediate feedback to pupils.
10. **Hidden**; the criteria of assessment remain strange to pupils. Targets are not set jointly.

(Eisner 1999a; Eisner 1999b; Lehman 1999; Hargreaves, Galton & Robinson 1996; McAllister 1999; Bresler 1994; Korkeakoski 1998)

3. New approaches to assessment in arts education at school

Nowadays, hardly anyone will deny the importance of assessment and feedback in the process of teaching and learning. But despite this, the negative impact of assessment still exists and is hard to remove. In arts education new approaches to assessment refer to a longer-term, more fine-grained evaluation of the art process in which the product has evolved. This includes a formative form of assessment in contrast to a summative one, which covers the overall evaluation of a piece of art work which has been undertaken over a period of time, taking into account the final artistic product. Both of these are actually complementary aspects of assessment in the arts as Hargreaves et al. have pointed out (Hargreaves, Galton & Robinson 1996). The other distinction between old and new type of evaluations depends on who is evaluating and in what way. Gardner and Grunbaum (1986), for example, has proposed an alternative approach to assessment based on a workshop environment. That means an assessment of apprenticeship relationship between teachers and pupils when they are working together and carrying out meaningful real-life artistic projects under the guidance of involved and committed teachers. In this, assessment takes

the form of joint evaluations of portfolios of pupils´ work. (Hargreaves, Galton & Robinson 1996, 200)

The concepts of *authentic assessment* and *performance assessment* are generic terms which describe new approaches to assessment (UK) (Torrance 1995). As Torrance (1995, 1-3) says, assessment tasks designed for students should be more practical, realistic, and challenging than ´traditional´ assessment tasks usually are. Alongside new ways of assessment several new concepts have appeared, such as *appraisal*, *monitoring*, *auditing*, and even the business concept of *´bench-marking´*, which means comparing the strengths of competing companies to one´s own activity. Instead of using the earlier mentioned concepts Raevaara (1998) uses the concept of *criticism*, which according to him is very suitable for art criticism and the values of the art world today.

The tasks of evaluation used to belong above all to teachers´ fields of work and their pedagogical expertise, and in this pupils played virtually no part. Unfortunately, this is still often the case. Because of the nature of art assessment should be more subjective, which means that the art maker is the most important person to evaluate his/her own product and process. In a small-scale study using a grounded theory method, class teachers´ views on teaching visual arts revealed that only a few teachers allow students to take part in assessment and that "good work" is something that corresponds to the teacher´s own expectations and criteria. Furthermore, teachers think that student assessment means the evaluation of a student´s giftedness and talents (sense of form, colour, design, and his/her creativity) when compared with other classmates. Assessment was mainly by grading: it was product-orientated and was usually given at the end of each term. Social adjustment criteria like "neatness" or "positive attitude" were also mixed with subject-related criteria (Peussa 1999, 63-67).

On the other hand, depending on the meaning and purpose of the assessment, whether for judgement or developmental purposes (Brown et al. 1997, 9), evaluation is the job of an expert, as a teacher should indeed be. Lenni Haapasalo (1994) uses the concept of assessment to mean the continuous observation of the progress of the process. Figure 1 depicts how the standards of assessment are above all part of the professional skills of a competent teacher. They are intended for assessment during lessons and consequently the teacher can inform other interested parties about the pupil's/pupils´ progress. On the other hand, an important function of assessment is to provide guidance and

feedback to the learner, as much it has to do with judging institutional quality (Broadfoot 1996, 7).

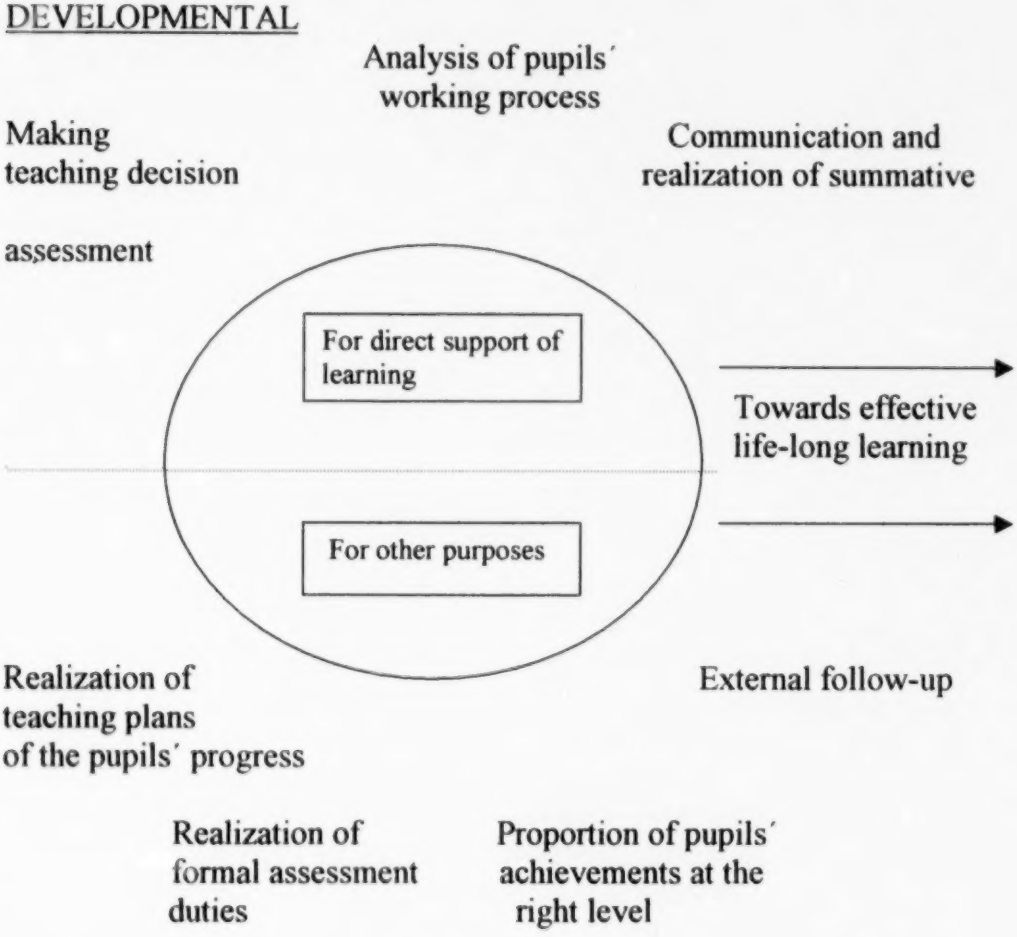
DEVELOPMENTAL
Analysis of pupils´ working process
Making teaching decision
Communication and realization of summative assessment
For direct support of learning
Towards effective life-long learning
For other purposes
Realization of teaching plans of the pupils´ progress
External follow-up
Realization of formal assessment duties
Proportion of pupils´ achievements at the right level
JUDGEMENTAL

Figure 1. Assessment and development (applied from: Haapasalo 1994; Brown et al. 1997).

4. Some new forms to assessment in arts education

In the years 1992-98 in Finland a team carried out experimental and developmental research into the assessment of skill and art subjects in the upper secondary school (gymnasium) in order to initiate a ´upper secondary school Craft Diploma´ (in Gymnasium). According to a

working team the matriculation examination should be constructed, more than before, on the basis of students´ own abilities and interests. In addition, the assessment of arts should take place for a longer period of studies so that students have the opportunity to show their artistic and technically skilful production and their skills in arts. (Suojanen 1998, 63). In these courses students analyse and evaluate their own works and their working processes in a portfolio. A portfolio creates a theoretical frame which enables students to study crafts as a part of a wider wholeness, at the same time a portfolio is a tool for developing the student's self-assessment.

Craft courses in the upper secondary school are easily carried out as projects. In addition to the product, the individual working process gives a natural opportunity to combine theory and practice. Students can also widen their skills by using knowledge learned in other subjects. This will promote multilevel cognitive development and ways of action and thinking which enable students to grow from the level of technical reflection to the level of critical reflection, where thinking skills have an important role (Suojanen 1998) (see figure 2).

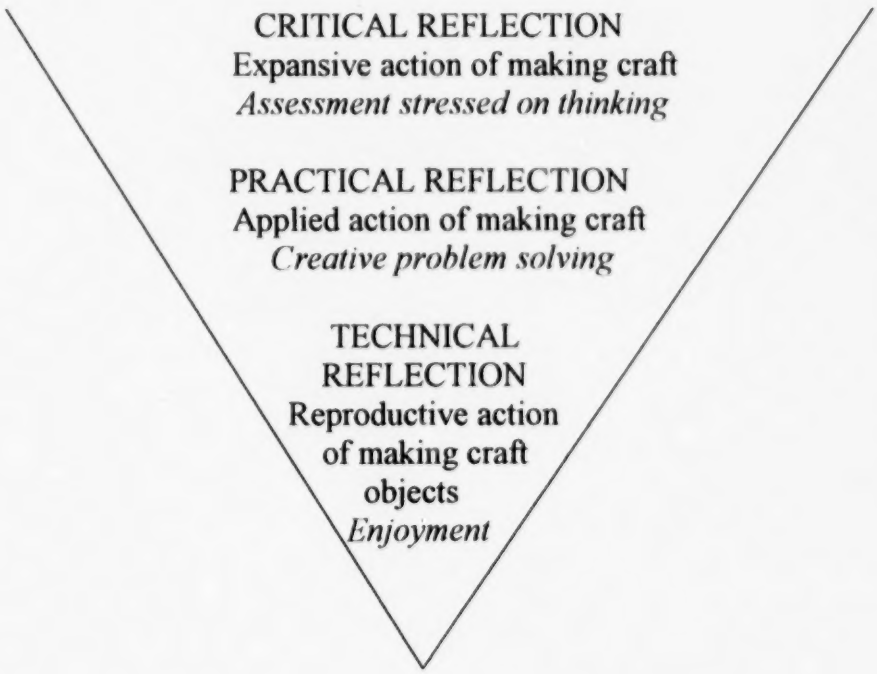

Figure 2. Expansion of the view of making craft, derived from Suojanen (1998, 70)

The type of assessment in arts which has attracted increasing interest, is the portfolio. The portfolio as a tool of self-assessment offers fruitful ground for reflection of a student's personal growth and development. But there is always a risk that portfolios are just collections of works with too little information about process and thinking. For that reason the information given on how to evaluate one´s own process and thinging should be clarified. A teacher should also make clear the criteria of student assessment, as Lindström proposes. Process, for example involves endurance, imagination, the courage to carry out one´s own plans and experiment with new ones, the capability to learn from others, self-knowledge. The product, on the other hand, involves the realization of a plan, the composition of a picture, and crafts (Lindström 1998, 34-35). Moreover, the basis of knowledge which will be evaluated in an art portfolio differs from those of traditional assessments. A portfolio concerns, for example, ´explorer work´, ´inventiveness´, ´utilization of exemplars´, and the ´capability of self-assessment´ (Lindström 1998, 35). On the other hand, as Butterfield (1995, 24) points out, the process of self-assessment does not automatically involve students in the processes if the targets and objectives are already a given of the situation in which students find themselves. The deconstructive view (Butterwield 1995) emphasises the importance of the individual pupil and student to be able to participate in the settlement of objectives as well as in the assessment of his/her own objectives and learning process. There is also the inherent weakness of the unequal power of the teacher to consider, as well as the resource problem of how a teacher finds enough time for individual processes.

Butterfield (1995) groups assessment into four categories: the deconstructive view, the bureaucratic view, the market view, and the liberal humanistic view. The portfolio could be placed in two categories in this classification, namely the deconstructive view (mentioned above) and the liberal humanistic view.

A portfolio in the liberal humanistic view would match with the basic idea of supporting the individual development prosess of a student. Butterfield (1995) emphasises the expertness of a teacher, but a pupil and student can become expert on themselves, what they actually are. They are the only ones who have undergone the process of making their own art thoroughly and thus they are able to describe something that is not visible. Compared with the deconstructive the view humanistic approach pays more attention to human growth, and not just to the cognitive learning process. In a process involving growth tacit

knowledge plays an important role, though tacit knowledge is a many-sided concept and is difficult to measure and describe. A portfolio could, however, be one tool to reveal some of its mystery.

Martti Raevaara (1998) has used the critique-technique to study critiques during courses in fine arts at the University of Art and Design in Helsinki (1998, ´Criticizing visual exercises in the context of art and design education – critiques as a part of the artistic learning process´). Could that technique be transferred also to comprehensive school? Certainly. Ross et al. (1993) have done so using reflective conversations between teacher and pupil, in which the pupil´s self-appraisal is an essential part of the assessment process. Reflective conversations produce rich and detailed information about the processes of artistic thinking in individuals. (Hargreaves et al. 1996) Lindström also emphasises that conversation does not relate only to ready works and pictures but also to the aesthetic learning process in its totality (Lindström 1998, 35).

Hargreaves et al. (1996) have studied how primary teachers evaluate children´s work in visual arts, music, and creative writing. Teachers´ descriptions of arts activities and artistic products were analysed using repertory grid technique. The first aim of the study was to create a vocabulary (taxonomy) of primary teachers´ assessment in the arts in order to make teachers´ implicit assumptions explicit. The second aim was to establish the extent of the vocabulary which could be used by different teachers. (Hargreaves, Galton & Robinson 1996). The study was based on summative evaluations which omit wider investigations of the formative aspects of the assessment process, and the study shows the importance of the time needed for evaluation to find more details on artistic production. The lack of time was also mentioned in Bresler´s studies about school practices in the arts (Bresler 1998). Compared to Lindström (1998) the taxonomy of Hargreaves et al. (1996) is practical while Lindström´s is more theoretical. Lindstöm divides evaluation criteria in three parts: product, process, and overall evaluation. He also gives didactic advice in line with the same criteria.

Boyd White (1998) has used ´open letters´ to emphasise the co-responsibility of student and teacher in maintaining and sometimes to initiating dialogue. He has created aesthetigrams for mapping aesthetic experiences. Even though the aesthetigram is not created particularly for assessment I see some common aspects which can be useful for the assessment of students´ works, processes and thinking skills at the comprehensive school level. The study is a form of continuous evaluation where the task is to examine the moments, or components,

of the aesthetic encounters and the particular manner of their interrelatedness. The technique increases students´ understanding of aesthetic encounters and their own self-observation. By ´silent conversations´, reflection, evaluation and sharing with others, students learn to find elements so as to assess their own works and others in the visual arts, and as a result of this process their thinking skills increase. (White 1998, see also Räsänen 1999). Similarly Cunliffe (1998) has used semantic differentials to help pupils analyse the mood and expression in a work of art through the use of interpretative reasoning, conjectured knowledge and logical justification (Cunliffe 1998, 61-65).

These kinds of approaches to assessment based on developing students´ understanding in arts, skills in thinking and in self-development seem to be common at the moment. From this point of view interpreting a work of art, discussions, conversation, critiques, mediation and even debate about art and artistic works are essential not only for assessment but particularly for learning (see also Cunliffe 1998). And as Torrance (1995,2) and Brown et al. (1997, 7) arque, if you want to change student learning change the methods of assessment. However, some versions of formative assessment, usually associated with a constructivist perspective on the process of learning, should concentrate more, not so much on what students have learned or have not learned, but on what they might learn in the immediate future (Torrance 1995).

Besides being central to effective life-long learning, self-assessment plays a part in developing professional competence (Brown et al. 1997, 178). In recent years higher priority has been given to encouraging people to continue their education as life-long learning. Above all, there is an urgent need for education systems to train people who will have the appropriate range of skills and attitudes to be capable of understanding a variety of work roles in a climate of rapid changes. Problem solving abilities, personal effectiveness, thinking skills, and the willingness to accept changes are typical of the general competencies of cognitive and affective domains that are now being sought in young people. Consequently, the expectations of society demand certain aspects from school assessment as well. From this point of view pupils and students should increase their skills in ´self-marketing´ so as to be capable to express the best parts of themselves. A portfolio could play a role as the visiting card of a student when she/he applies for further studies. The other alternative could be the ´records of achievement´ presented by Pole (1993) in England, a summary document or record which young people could take with them when leaving school or college. It would be recognised and valued by employers and institutions of further and higher education.

5. Towards a theoretical framework

As a summary, some common aspects in new approaches in assessment can be outlined:

1. From the assessment of product towards the assessment of process, where the product evolved means:

   from the product to the thinking process
   from summative to more formative assessment

   For example:

   - repertory grid technique (theory of personal constructs)
   - semantic differentials

2. From teacher-centred assessment to co-responsible assessment and students self-assessment

   For example:

   - triangulation
   - joint evaluation in groups
   - peer-assessment
   - aesthetigrams
   - open letters
   - diaries
   - portfolios
   - records of achievement
   - 'self-marketing'

3. From the assessment of written/drawing examinations towards the assessment of oral skills in communication

   For example:

   - dialogue
   - oral presentations
   - critique and endurance
   - reflective conversations
   - 'self-marketing'

	JUDGEMENTAL Concerned with a) steps to the next stage or b) allocation of resources	DEVELOPMENTAL Concerned with improving student learning
	PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT	AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT
SUMMATIVE	Records of achievement Nation-wide assessment (tests)	Dialogue Critique and endurance aesthetigrams Repertory grids
FORMATIVE	Portfolios 'Self-marketing' Barometers	Portfolios Diaries Open letters Silent conversations Reflective conversations Dialogue Critique and endurance Aesthetigrams Semantic differentials Repertory grids
RELATIONSHIP TO ASPECTS OF EDUCATION	To: curriculum and institution The world of further and higher studies and work	To: development and learning The world of personal Development and life-long learning

Figure 3. A theoretical framework of assessment approaches in arts education.

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